

BRUCE L. BRALEY
1ST DISTRICT, IOWA

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OVERSIGHT AND GOVERNMENT
REFORM COMMITTEE

POPULIST CAUCUS
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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
1727 Longworth Building
Washington, DC 20515
(202) 225-2911 | Fax (202) 225-6666

WATERLOO DISTRICT OFFICE

219 East 4th Street
Waterloo, IA 50703
Phone: (319) 287-3233
Fax: (319) 287-5104

DAVENPORT DISTRICT OFFICE

209 W. 4th St., Suite 104
Davenport, IA 52801
Phone: (563) 323-5988
Fax: (563) 323-5231

DUBUQUE DISTRICT OFFICE

1050 Main Street
Dubuque, IA 52001
Phone: (563) 557-7789
Fax: (563) 557-1324

February 8, 2012

Secretary Leon Panetta
Department of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301

Dear Secretary Panetta,

I write with serious concern regarding the Air Force's recently clarified decisions on force restructuring and its impact on the Air National Guard. The combat aircraft retirements and re-missioning discussed in the Air Force proposal unduly affect the Air National Guard over the Active Component, and do not reflect an effort to maintaining the Guard and Reserve or show a balanced approach to achieving budget efficiencies.

Mr. Secretary, you've stated yourself that the Guard and Reserve forces have proved their combat readiness and combat effectiveness over the past 10 years. As decisions are made to reorient our force and drawdown our current combat commitments, we must work to maintain that readiness and effectiveness while also capitalizing on the wealth of knowledge and experience within our Guard and Reserve units to maintain the total force. The Air Force proposal highlights the value of our Guard forces in associations with the active component while also removing a significant number of combat aircraft from them

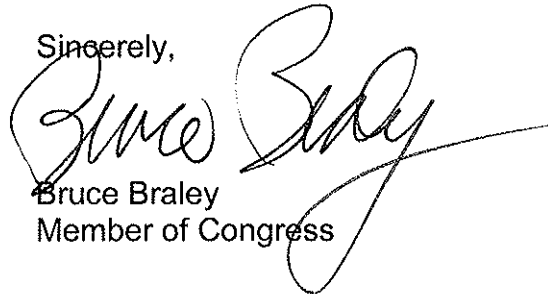
Furthermore, I have serious concerns over the lack of budgetary consideration in the decision. While I applaud the Air Force's efforts to find budget efficiencies through the early retirement and delayed procurement of some aircraft, I have great concern that the bulk of retirements appear to come at the expense of Guard and Reserve units. The Guard and Reserve are highly efficient forces, maintaining experienced pilots and performing many of the same missions of active component forces when activated at a much lower costs to the Active Component over the long-term. The shifts of combat aircraft to Active Component and elimination of missions in the Guard Component achieves significantly less savings than if the situation were reversed. Furthermore, the decisions to replace combat air force missions in the guard with unmanned aircraft Remote Split Operations missions also make little budgetary sense as there is a continued need for unmanned aircraft in Afghanistan and elsewhere. These missions will require a significant investment of time beyond the standard drill periods of many of

our Guard that will have a higher cost and a greater impact on our Guardsmen's civilian careers.

I recognize that the funding constraints we currently face require difficult decisions to be made in prioritizing the roles and resources of all aspects of the Air Force. I am disappointed that faced with these challenges, the Air Force chose to target one of the most efficient aspects of their force in finding reductions. This proposal is deeply flawed and deserves a full explanation of the budgetary analysis that went into making it. I urge you to reconsider this decision to better protect the National Guard and support its long-term viability as part of the force.

Thank you for your consideration of this important issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bruce Braley", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

Bruce Braley
Member of Congress

Cc: Mr. Michael Donley, Secretary of the Air Force